

commentary

from other pens...

Lincoln's ambition for himself, a cause

Abraham Lincoln, preparing for his 1858 debates with Stephen A. Douglas, said his ambitions for high political office were so clear that if he were to deny them "I would only make myself look ridiculous." "I have never professed an indifference to the honors of official station..." Lincoln said in a private note written as he collected his thoughts for the series of seven Senate campaign debates across Illinois.

But Lincoln said he had never forgotten that in a republic "there is a higher aim than that of mere office." Two years before his election as president, four years before he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, he identified his own higher aim as the eventual elimination of slavery, a goal he thought would take many decades to accomplish.

"I cannot but regard it as possible that the higher object of this contest may not be completely attained within the term of my natural life," Lincoln wrote in the memo, now in the manuscript collection of the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of New York.

"But I cannot doubt either that it will come in due time," he wrote. "Even in this view, I am proud in my passing speck of time, to contribute a humble mite to that glorious consummation which my own poor eyes may not last to see."

Lincoln's note, a single page from a longer effort, has its own history. In 1892, Robert Todd Lincoln, the 16th president's son, gave it to England's Duchess of St. Albans, explaining it had been written in 1858 as his father prepared for his debates with Douglas.

Challenging Douglas for his Senate seat, Lincoln laid the groundwork for the debates in his "House Divided" speech, in which he contended that the United States could not permanently endure half slave and half free but would become "all one thing or all the other."

Lincoln portrayed slavery as morally wrong, advocated its restriction to the slaveholding South and opposed its expansion to federal territories. In the memo, Lincoln noted parallels between the American abolitionist movement and the long struggle in Britain to end the slave trade.

"I have not allowed myself to forget that the abolition of the slave trade by Great Britain... had its fire-breathing opponents; its stealthy 'don't care' opponents; its Negro equality opponents; and its religion and good order opponents."

Furthermore, "all these opponents got offices, and their adversaries got none," Lincoln said.

"But I have also remembered that though they blazed like tallow candles for a century, at last they flickered in the socket, died out, stank in the dark for a brief season, and were remembered no more, even by the smell."

Analyzing Lincoln's words historian Allen C. Guelzo of Eastern University, near Philadelphia, said it is clear the 16th president knew just how large ambition figured in his own character.

"But he understood how necessary it was to the survival of popular government that ambition become the servant, not the master," Guelzo wrote. "His ambition was a little engine that knew no rest," is the famous summation provided by Lincoln's law partner, William Herndon.

But there were at least two sides to it. Guelzo quotes Lincoln as telling an acquaintance just before the Gettysburg Address in 1863 that "the proudest ambition he could desire was to do something for the elevation of the condition of his fellow man."

Some of the thoughts in Lincoln's memo appear in his debates. "Ambition has been ascribed to me (and) I claim no insensibility to political honors," he wrote.

Lincoln added he would give up the honors and the offices to obtain the ends he sought. If slavery could be permanently restricted by re-electing Douglas to the Senate, he said, he would gladly agree "that Judge Douglas should never be out, and I never in" political office.

But it was Lincoln's restless ambition. Guelzo concludes, "that provided the fuel which led, against all his expectations in 1858, to 'that glorious consummation' of liberty and equality for all Americans."

EDITOR'S NOTE—Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on Congress, the White House and Washington's history for 35 years.



You have options when car repaired incorrectly

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

Recently the transmission on my vehicle needed to be repaired. I knew this type of repair would be expensive so I shopped around for the best price. When I chose a mechanic to do the work, I was told that the repair would take about three days. However, the shop had my car for about a month, and when I finally got my car back the transmission still was not fixed. I called the shop and was told to bring my car back in under warranty. Since this shop took so long to do a repair that is not right, I do not trust it anymore and I just want my money back. Attorney General Stovall, what can I do?



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

Dear Kansas Consumer:

Under Kansas law, suppliers must provide certain implied warranties for the goods and/or services they sell which apply in addition to the express warranties they may provide. These implied warranties include the workmanlike performance of work or skill, services sold, the merchantability of products sold and the fitness for a particular purpose of products sold.

The repair shop had given you a 12-month/12,000 mile express warranty on the parts and labor of the repair. Under both express or implied warranties, if the goods and/or services develop a problem, the consumer must give the supplier notice of the problem and the opportunity to correct it. In an auto repair situation, this usually means taking the vehicle back to the original repair shop.

If, after a reasonable number of attempts, the supplier cannot make the goods and/or services conform, the consumer can request a refund. If the supplier is unwilling to give a refund, the consumer can file a civil lawsuit against the supplier. If the repairs cost \$1,800 or less, the consumer can sue in small claims court. Although the Kansas Consumer Protection Act does not give my Consumer Protection Division jurisdiction to take enforcement action in cases of shoddy workmanship in the

performance of services, we will mediate these types of complaints in an effort to help prevent the parties from going to court.

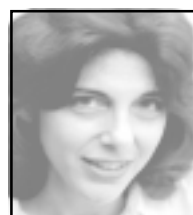
In this instance, you had already taken your car to another transmission repair facility prior to contacting my office.

We contacted the original mechanic, who in turn agreed to pay the second shop to do the repair as a good-will gesture. Keep in mind, though, that this is not typical as most shops will not agree to pay another shop for a repair.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and your call will be returned promptly.

Last rites can't save Torricelli

Where have I been all of Bob Torricelli's life? There he was this week, performing last rites on his scandal-riddled Senate career with an act of self-eulogy that may well be illegal in several states. And there I was, listening transfixed, amazed — incredulous, even — but mainly filled with regret that my first Torricelli speech would be my last.



diana west

• commentary

That is, having finally seen beyond the talking head emeritus to discover the real Torch — and in him a source of hot air which, properly harnessed, could reduce our dependence on Middle Eastern oil — I realized that new devotees of the one-term Democratic senator would have to reconcile themselves to losing him for good. His re-election bid is over, he said, because he just couldn't "stand the pain if any failing on my part were to damage the things and the people that I have fought for all of my life" — namely, the one-vote Democratic Senate majority. And now we all suffer.

Why? For one thing, there will be no more Great Man in the Making stories that, fantastically, sound less Joisey-colorful than "Kung Fu" TV-show philosophical. There's the one about a New Jersey governor seeing a young Torricelli in the statehouse and saying, "Bob, why are you here first and why do you leave last?" ("Governor, I'm going to do good things," Young Torch replied.) Or, better, the time Torricelli says he encountered a solitary Anwar Sadat on the Egyptian shores of the Mediterranean, and Sadat inquired: "Son, who are you? ... What is it you want to do with your life?" ("I'm Bob Torricelli," he replied. "Mr. President, I'm going to be a member of the United States Congress.")

If not the stuff of dreams, this surely is the stuff of shirts. Never mind that it came in the speech in which Torricelli resigned, or abdicated, or whatever you do to bail out of a Senate race five weeks

from Election Day because the sleaze has begun to stick; it's terrific material. And so is the Democratic senator's refusal to acknowledge why he is leaving the race. "In public life," he explained, maintaining impressive blush-control, "if you actually seek more than satisfaction for yourself in the things you achieve, you will always be frustrated. I've never been frustrated, because it's enough for me."

It is? Then why in God's green Garden State didn't Torricelli tell that to David Chang once the erstwhile entrepreneur, now serving a stretch in a federal pen for dicey campaign contributions to Torricelli (natch), started showering the senator with pricey baubles, fancy suits, fistfuls of cash and a wide-screen television? No matter. Better to "think about the trophies of my life," as Torricelli put it, those political triumphs "that really only I know about, but really, that's enough."

Nice effect, that — modest, intriguing — and only somewhat decimated by his proceeding to enumerate said "trophies" in some detail: the lives changed "because of the mammography centers that I created"; the child who "will play in a park that I funded and land that I saved"; and "some senior citizen who doesn't even know my name and nothing about what we're doing today" (a Torricelli voter?) who "will live at a senior center that I helped to build." Big sigh. "That's my life," he added with the satisfaction of having just won a floor vote creating the first seven days. "Don't

feel badly for me. I changed people's lives."

The prevaricating, sappy brazenness of it all: How will the Democratic Party get along without him? Frankly, it won't. That is, it can't. Just because Torricelli is exiting the Senate race to avoid defeat at the hands of a Republican — not to mention an electorate disgusted by a venal streak odiferous enough to qualify for Superfund assistance — doesn't mean Senate Democrats are finished with him. After all, they created this candidate. They have to answer for him.

It's not that Torricelli is the first U.S. senator to be brought down by a wide-screen television set or era-appropriate equivalent. What's significant about his fall from integrity is the safety net slung under him by the Democratic leadership. Once the Senate Ethics Committee, having dragged its feet on the case longer than Neanderthal Man, gave Torricelli a pass — sorry, "severely admonished" him — for his conduct in the Chang affair, the fix was in: preserving the Democratic Senate majority at any cost, even by saving a senator who prized diamond earrings more than his reputation, was the order of the day. As for the voters? Fuggeddaboutit, Senate Democrats seemed to say: The people of New Jersey will never know the difference.

That last bit, the contempt for the voter, is what rankles most about the Torricelli debacle. And that's something that doesn't change at the last minute with the face of the candidate.

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